



BY ALLEN UPWARD.

This is the First Instalment of a New Series of exciting Ghost Stories. They are entirely Different in Conception from Anything of the Kind that has ever been Published before. Each Story is Complete in Itself

I—THE STORY OF THE GREEN HOUSE, WALLINGTON.

In undertaking to relate some of my experiences in connection with the purchase and sale of haunted houses, I desire to make it clear that I have no theories to put forward on the subject of what is called the "occult."

I was successful in this class of business, but some of the adventures I went through were of such a character that I dared not continue. My nerves are fairly strong, but there are some things which I never wish to face again.

I was first tempted to dabble in this unlucky class of business by the Green House, Wallington.

My partner, Mr. Mortimer—our firm is Mortimer & Hargreaves—mentioned to me one day that he had had a client in to see him who was very anxious to obtain an immediate offer, at almost any price, for a house situated in what was then the rural district of Wallington.

"He says he cannot sell the house because people think it is haunted. It is all nonsense, of course; but the people in the neighbourhood have got the idea firmly into their heads; and now if any tenants come they are sure to hear of it directly, and get frightened. The result is that he has lost tenant after tenant, and now the reputation of the house is so bad that he cannot sell it."

"What sort of a house is it?" I asked. "And what will he take for it?"

"He says he will take anything—£500 if

he can't get more; though the house cost £1,500 to build. You had better see the man yourself."

I therefore dropped a line to Mr. Giltstrap, the owner of the Green House, requesting him to go down with me to see the property.

On the way to Wallington I put some questions about the house to Giltstrap, whose manner was rather reserved. He assured me it was in thorough repair, but he seemed reluctant to answer when I asked him about the ghost.

"Is there any story about the house? Anything to account for its being haunted?"

"No; no. What story should there be? It's a modern house—hardly been built ten years."

"And how long has it been your property?"

"I bought it as soon as it was put up."

"And how long has it been haunted?"

Mr. Giltstrap frowned as though he disliked to hear this word.

"The house has been talked about for some years now—four or five."

His disinclination to speak was so evident that I did not care to pursue the subject.

We got out at Wallington Station, and as we passed a house agent's on the road Giltstrap said abruptly:

"I must step in here and get the keys. Wait a moment."

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As a house-agent myself, I could understand that he did not wish to introduce me to the local man, lest it should lead to any dispute about commission. But my curiosity about the Green House was so strong that I could not resist the temptation to walk in after him.

I was just in time to hear the owner say curtly:

"I have called for the keys of the Green House, if you please."

The local agent was evidently a man in a small way, for we found him seated at a desk in the outer office, in his shirtsleeves. He gave a cross look at Giltstrap, and a suspicious one at me, and then rose and reached down the keys from a nail.

"I haven't been able to find a caretaker yet," he said with a touch of malice. "They say you must pay them for living in such a house."

Giltstrap reddened at this speech, which was calculated to put off an intending purchaser. He glared first at the agent and then at me, snatched the keys without a word, and hurried out.

The Green House was a modern, red-brick one, standing in a road with several others, and certainly not looking at all the kind of place to have a supernatural legend attached to it.

As soon as we got inside I saw that the house was partly furnished. Giltstrap explained that he had been trying to get someone to come and occupy it rent free for a time in order to live down its reputation.

I asked if there was any room particularly connected with the ghostly rumours.

After what struck me as a momentary hesitation, he led me upstairs into what was

clearly the principal bedroom, overlooking the front garden and the road outside.

"Is this where the ghost walks?" I asked as I glanced round the empty room. The paper on the walls was in good condition, and the ceiling had been newly white-washed.

The owner of the Green House was plainly annoyed by my insistence.

"There is no ghost, and it does not walk anywhere," he said irritably.

"But the people who sleep in this room complain."

"What do they complain of?"

He fidgeted and again showed some reluctance in answering.

"Oh, nothing except some nonsense or other. They say they do not sleep well, and they dream things. Fancies, you know—fancies."

"Well, what sort of fancies?" I persisted. "If they dream, they must dream of something."

Giltstrap glanced up at the ceiling, and swiftly withdrew his eyes with a nervous tremor. I was now firmly persuaded that he himself had been the victim of some spectral horror, though he was anxious to conceal it for fear of frightening me off.

"Perhaps I had better not tell you anything," he said, after considering a moment. "There is a great deal in the influence of suggestion, so it is said. If I were to tell you what the people who have slept in this room have seen, or dreamt they have seen, that might be enough to make you dream the same. Whereas, if a sensible man without any notions came and slept here, he would most likely never be disturbed."

I thought there was something in what he said, and did not press him further.



"There is no ghost, and it does not walk anywhere," he said irritably.

There was a staircase outside leading to a second floor, and I moved towards it.

"Oh, do you want to see the other rooms?" Giltstrap snapped, as he prepared to follow.

"I want to see everything," I said decidedly.

Upstairs I found another room which had been left unfurnished. The prospect from the window showed me that it was situated over the haunted chamber.

"Is there something wrong with this room, as well?" I demanded.

"The servants don't like sleeping in it," was the grudging admission. "It does very well as a boxroom."

I saw that it was useless to try and extract any more information from Giltstrap.

After a thorough inspection, I decided that the house would be well worth £1200, apart from its evil reputation. I went back to town with the owner, and bargained with him on the way.

I was very anxious to secure an option to purchase the Green House at the end of a month, during which time I was to occupy it, but this proposal the owner obstinately refused.

"I want to sell it outright or not at all. If you live in it a month and have no trouble, I shall then be able to ask a reasonable price."

Anxious to secure a bargain, I gave way, and got out at Victoria the owner of the Green House, at the price of £500.

When I told my partner the next day what I had done, he declined to commit himself.

"I shall know whether it is a good bargain or not when I hear what you have sold it for," he observed grimly.

My next step was to secure some attendance, and to send down some furniture for the two empty rooms round which the mystery appeared to cling.

In the course of the negotiations I had occasion for the services of my lady secretary.

I was accustomed to discuss business matters with her, and as soon as she learned the character of the present transaction, she surprised me by displaying an unusual interest in it. She even volunteered her assistance.

"I wonder if you would mind my going to see the Green House, Mr. Hargreaves? I am very much interested in psychical research."

"Do you mean that you really believe there is something in it?" I exclaimed in dismay. I had grown to look on Miss

Sargent as a young lady of great intelligence, and I was not very well pleased at the idea of taking the ghost seriously.

"I know that there are things in Nature which ordinary rules do not explain," was the grave answer. "I have seen things myself which could not be accounted for by natural means."

This was rather alarming. I recalled the strange, uneasy manner of the late owner of the Green House, and asked myself whether he had not been a secret believer in some occult happenings.

"I am what is called a sensitive," Miss Sargent proceeded to explain. "I have a peculiar faculty for seeing any abnormal manifestations."

A thought struck me.

"Would it be possible for you to go and pass a night or two there?" I inquired. "I don't mind telling you that if the apparition, or whatever it is, can be exorcised, I hope to sell the house at a considerable profit; and I should be glad to pay a small commission."

Miss Sargent appeared to welcome the suggestion. She was a good girl, the chief support of a widowed mother and three little sisters, and I knew she would like to earn something for them.

The question was referred to her mother, who arranged to come with her, it being understood that I should form one of the party. I engaged a respectable woman to come in by the day, and, on the evening agreed upon, we went down together to take possession of the haunted house.

Miss Sargent and her mother were installed in the haunted room, and I decided to occupy the attic overhead.

After a pleasant supper the two ladies retired at about eleven o'clock. I sat up a little later, smoking a cigar, and contrasting the cheerful evening I had just passed with the lonely ones I was accustomed to in my West-end chambers.

Towards twelve I went upstairs, intending to go to bed. But whether it was the sensation of being in a strange house under such circumstances, or a secret apprehension of which I was hardly conscious, no sooner did I find myself in the room I had chosen than I was seized with an overmastering reluctance to get into the bed.

I took off my coat merely, rolled myself well up in the blankets, and tried to go to sleep. I am an old traveller, and have never experienced any difficulty in sleeping in my clothes in trains, or under similar circumstances.

But on this occasion the attempt was hopeless; I lay on the bed literally shivering, and not from cold. I neither saw nor heard anything, I was not alarmed in the ordinary sense, and yet if I had known there was a murderer lurking in the room ready to spring on me and stab me the moment I closed my eyes I could not have felt more wretchedly afraid.

Suddenly I heard a low moan—the moan of a creature in mortal terror, drawn out till it became a muffled scream.

I flung off the blankets, raised my head, and listened with a beating heart.

The moan was repeated, coming distinctly from underneath me. In an instant I had grasped the truth. It came from the room below.

I sprang from the bed, and, without stopping to put on my coat, lit the candle I had brought up with me, and flew downstairs.

As I reached the first floor landing the moan was repeated in a more terrible key—the key of horror instead of terror. At the same moment the door of the haunted room was thrown open, and Mrs. Sargent appeared on the threshold, with a cloak thrown over her shoulders, and a look of fear and distress on her face.

“What is it?” I gasped.

“It is Alwyne!” she cried in answer. “She is seeing something horrible in her sleep, and I can’t wake her!”

Without stopping to consider questions of etiquette, I dashed into the room. The gas had been turned full on, and by its light I saw the girl lying stretched on a couch at the foot of the bed, her features frozen into the expression of one who looks upon some horrid sight, while from her parted lips there issued those appalling sounds which wounded like the stabs of a knife.

I caught her by the shoulders and shook her, without making the slightest change in her swoon-like condition.

“Water!” I called out to the mother, who stood wringing her hands, too dazed to act.

The water was brought, and I dashed half a glassful in the face of the sufferer. At first it had no more effect than if she had been dead.

Then came a startling change.

The moans suddenly ceased, the victim opened her eyes, which showed the dull glassy stare of a somnambulist, and sitting half up, she commenced muttering so quickly and indistinctly that it was difficult to catch the words.

“The-blood-the-blood-the-blood-the-blood-dripping-dripping-dripping-dripping-from-the-red-leak-in-the-ceiling-the-red-leak-in-the-red-leak-in-the-ceiling-in-the-ceiling-dripping-on-me-dripping-on-me-dripping-on-ME!”

The words rose into a wild shriek as her blank eyes were turned full on the ceiling overhead, the ceiling between her room and mine.

Involuntarily I looked up. The ceiling did not show the slightest mark. As I had noticed when I went over the house with Gilt-strap, it was newly whitewashed—I thought I now knew why.

But the moment was not for reflection.

“Help me to carry her out of this—quick!” I called out to the mother.

Between us we lifted up the unconscious girl and carried her out of the accursed room, and into one adjoining, where we laid her on the bed.

Hardly had she passed the doorway of the haunted chamber when the dreadful ejaculations began to die away, and the rigidity of the features to relax. In a short time the trance condition passed away into a deep sleep, and I was able to leave Miss Sargent to her mother’s care.

When she woke in the morning, her mother told me, she remembered nothing whatever of what had passed in the night. She was barely conscious of having had a bad dream.

At her own request, I described to her at



The moan was repeated, coming distinctly from underneath me.



The gas had been turned full on, and by its light I saw the girl lying stretched on a couch at the foot of the bed.

breakfast what had occurred, as minutely as possible. She was profoundly impressed.

"I am certain," she declared with conviction, "that what I saw represents something that actually happened in this house. Dreadful as it sounds, I firmly believe that somebody has been murdered in that attic in which you slept, and that his blood did drip through the ceiling of the room below, as I saw it last night."

Reluctant as I was for many reasons to entertain such a suggestion, I dared not neglect it altogether. I determined at all

events to do whatever could be done to solve the mystery.

As soon as Miss Sargent and her mother had left the house, in which the elder lady would not hear of their passing another night, though her daughter did not seem in the least afraid, I went straight to a builder's in the neighbourhood, and engaged him to send some men to examine the flooring between the

two haunted rooms.

The builder received my order with marked interest.

"I knew there was something the matter with that house," he observed. "It ain't likely that tenant after tenant would come away scared without something was wrong. Why, do you know, sir, in the last five years, since Mr. Giltstrap gave it up, I've white-washed one ceiling in that

house *nine times!*"

"Then Mr. Giltstrap once lived in it himself, did he?" I exclaimed.

"Seeing that I built it for him, I can say he did," was the answer.

"And why did he leave it?" I demanded, fairly roused.

But the builder could not or would not satisfy my curiosity on that head.

"Mr. Giltstrap was a good customer of mine; he always paid me regular; and I ain't got nothing to say against him."

The builder's interest led him to accompany his men, a carpenter and a plasterer, to the scene of action.

I pointed out the place on the ceiling, as nearly as I could judge it, from which the ghostly dew had appeared to fall.

The men took measurements, and then, proceeding to the attic above, located a spot under the bed in which I had tried to sleep.

The bed was quickly removed, the flooring stripped off, and in the space between the joists there was exposed a mass of lime.

Both the men, as well as their master, were

quick to declare that the lime could not have been left there when the house was completed.

"That lime has been put there for no good," the builder asserted. "If you want some things hidden away and destroyed, there's nothing better than what lime is when it's fresh. It burns as well as fire, and makes no smoke."

"You mean a dead body?" I said shuddering.

"I don't say nothing about that," the builder answered, pulling himself up. "It ain't for me to say what that lime's been used for. All I say is it wasn't me that left it there, nor yet my men."

The two men began clearing the stuff away. The volatile element had evidently evaporated long ago. As they struck downward with their tools, one of them went through the plaster of the ceiling below, and a shaft of light came up.

An exclamation from one of the men followed. I bent down and peered into the cavity.

On a large beam which here crossed the floor I saw a deep black stain, the stain of long-dried blood!

A moment after the carpenter stooped suddenly, groped about with one hand amid the woodwork, and drew forth to

the light a small sharp stiletto, rusted with the same dismal stain.

Nothing more was found. I gave the builder an order to entirely renew the flooring between the two haunted rooms; and from the time that was done, there has never again been the slightest complaint from any occupier of the property.

I let the Green House almost immediately to a respectable tenant, a retired schoolmaster, who changed its name; and before a year was out I was able to dispose of it to a purchaser at the price of £1,250, a sum which enabled me to compensate Miss Sargent for her trying experience.

The most extraordinary part of the story remains to be told.

The report of what had taken place having got abroad in Wallington, the local police came to me to obtain the stiletto, which I had been careful to preserve. By its means they were enabled to unearth a crime which had gone unsuspected till that hour, and to extort a confession from the murderer.

Into the details of this terrible case I do not mean to enter. It is sufficient to say that the victim had perished while asleep in the attic, and that his blood had actually soaked through the ceiling into the room below, which was that of his murderer—Giltstrap!



MAISIE'S FROCKS

When Maisie's dressed in blue,
She's just a bird of Paradise—
A vision fair of summer skies,
That match the hue of her dear eyes,
When Maisie's dressed in blue.

When Maisie's dressed in pink,
Her dainty colour shames the rose
That in her garden warmly glows,
When she goes by, its petals close,
When Maisie's dressed in pink.

When Maisie's dressed in green,
On hot, close days, she brings glad
dreams
Of shady trees and sparkling
streams—
So bright, and cool, and fresh she
seems,
When Maisie's dressed in green.

When Maisie's dressed in brown,
Her air of russet autumn charms
Like leafy woods, my spirit calms,
I long to take her in my arms,
When Maisie's dressed in brown.

When Maisie's dressed in grey,
A fairy of the morning mist,
So sweet she looks (could you
resist?)
But much too dainty to be kissed,
When Maisie's dressed in grey.

When Maisie's dressed in white,
The best of all, a glorious sheen!
Ah, think, just think what it will
mean!
For Maisie on my arm shall lean,
When Maisie's dressed in white.

When Maisie's dressed in white,
The fairest sight a man could see,
The dearest thing on earth to me,
Ah! then my bride will Maisie be,
When Maisie's dressed in white!

Trixie Hobson.



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II.—THE TAPPING ON THE WAINSCOT.

THE mysterious incident which I am going to narrate is one which seems to have a particular interest for those who study occult phenomena.

According to some who have discussed it with me, it throws an important light on the conditions which prevail in the world of spirits, and the limitations to their action.

However, I do not care to say anything on the subject myself. My object is simply to set down facts, and leave others to draw their own conclusions.

It was about a year after the affair of the Green House, Wallington, already related, when our firm received instructions from the solicitors of Sir Henry Weetman to dispose by auction of his family mansion, Hailesbury Manor, Sussex.

I was told that Sir Henry was a distant relation, who had recently come into the title and estate on the death of the last baronet, and preferred to live abroad. The furniture and effects had been sold already by a firm of auctioneers, well known for their sales of that kind, and the house and estate were to follow.

I went down with a clerk to view the place, and found it to be a very handsome old Jacobean mansion, with valuable oak wainscot in all the principal rooms.

The caretaker who showed us over it was a dear old lady who had been housekeeper to the last baronet, and was evidently heart-

broken at the prospect of the old family seat passing into the possession of strangers.

"Sir Christopher—that's my late master—would turn in his grave if he knew what was being done with the old place," she lamented. "And I shouldn't wonder if he did know."

I was busy directing the clerk in taking measurements of the more important rooms and did not pay much heed to this obscure intimation.

In due course we reached the first floor, and the housekeeper conducted us into a great, square room with a huge fireplace, and two windows commanding a view over the park.

I was surprised to find that this room had not been stripped so completely as the ones downstairs. It still contained a magnificently carved oak bedstead, a four-poster, equal in size to the bedroom of a modern flat.

"This is the room Sir Christopher died in," the old lady said impressively. "He died in that bed. King Charles I. once slept in it."

"And why hasn't it been removed like the rest of the furniture?" I naturally asked.

"It is fixed to the floor, for one thing," was the answer. "And Sir Henry thought it would fetch more by leaving it where it is. But I believe he would have it taken away now if he knew what I know."

Mrs. Musgrave, as the old housekeeper was named, nodded her head and pursed up her

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lips, after the manner of old ladies when they have a secret which they are longing to tell, but which they think it due to their dignity only to part with under pressure.

"Why, what is it you know?" I asked, with an interest by no means feigned.

"Perhaps I ought not to speak of it," the housekeeper returned, with a glance at my clerk.

I sent the young man into the other room, and repeated my question.

"Well, sir, it may be that I ought not to be the first to mention it, but it's being talked of in the village, and if you didn't hear of it from me you'd hear of it from somebody else, most likely." Mrs. Musgrave lowered her voice: "This house is haunted, sir."

Remembering my late grisly experience, I did not reply as lightly as I might have done once to such a statement.

"Haunted? How? In what way?"

"You may believe me, or you may not, sir," Mrs. Musgrave said with deliberation, evidently in no hurry to come to the point. "There are some who can hear it, and some who can't. Some say it's only fancy, and others that it's the spirit of Sir Christopher. But all I can say is, I wouldn't pass a night in this room again, not if you were to offer me fifty pounds."

This was not very pleasant hearing. If a report of this kind were current in the village it would be pretty sure to reach the ears of any intending purchaser, and perhaps choke him off.

An old family ghost, or the tradition of one, is sometimes considered an attraction to a venerable country seat. But any really unpleasant phenomena, particularly if of quite recent date, would be a very decided drawback in most people's eyes.

"Can you tell me exactly what you did hear?" I asked.

"It is a tapping, sir, a tapping on the wainscot just over there," she pointed to the wall opposite the foot of the bed. "I was lying asleep in the bed, sir,—for when the house was stripped, and Sir Henry went away, I thought there would be no harm in my sleeping here, and I wanted to say I had slept in the same bed as King Charles. But it's my belief that Sir Henry must have heard the tapping himself, and seen something as well, that frightened him; and that's why he was so anxious to clear everything out of the house, and leave it."

I listened, hardly knowing what question to put next. At last I inquired:

"Do you suggest—is there any reason to

suppose—that there was anything wrong about Sir Christopher Weetman's death?"

The question took Mrs. Musgrave by surprise.

"Wrong, sir? What should there be wrong? I'm sure the poor gentleman couldn't have died more peacefully. Miss Alice and I were with him the whole time."

"Who was Miss Alice?"

"His daughter—at least, his adopted daughter. She had lived with him since she was a baby, and he made no difference between her and his own flesh and blood." Mrs. Musgrave's voice changed again, as she added: "And in my belief it's on her account that Sir Christopher walks."

"Why?"

"Because when Sir Henry came down he turned her out of the house with nothing but the clothes she stood in. Sir Christopher hadn't made a will, and he came into everything as the heir. Miss Alice had to go to London and take a situation as a waitress."

I mused in silence. Could there be anything in that strange suggestion? Was it not more likely that the old housekeeper's indignation at her new master's conduct had made her fancy that the ordinary noises of an old mansion by night were a protest on the part of the dead?

"And have you heard the tapping since?" I asked.

"*I hear it every night!*" was the startling answer. "I have shifted my bed to half the rooms in the house, but it makes no difference. Wherever I am, the taps come; and then they move along the wall and by the staircases and the corridors till they reach this room and stop there!"

"Have you followed them?" I exclaimed, astonished.

"I did the first time—now I daren't," the housekeeper answered. "But I got Jim Bateman from the lodge to come up one night, and he heard them, and followed them, and they led him to the same place. And now he would no more cross the threshold of the house after dark than he would fly."

It was clear to me by this time that, whether fact or fancy, the story called for investigation.

I am not naturally nervous, and in spite of the disagreeable memories of the last haunted house I had spent a night in, I determined to face whatever there was to face in Hailesbury Manor.

Accordingly, I arranged with Mrs. Musgrave to make up a bed for me the next

night but one. Not in the haunted room itself, that I did not feel disposed to risk, but so as to enable me to be at hand when the mysterious tapping began.

I was careful to say nothing in the office meanwhile, and, above all, to keep the matter from the ears of my lady secretary. Miss Sargent had solved the mystery of the Green House for me, but she had done so at the cost of an experience to which I could not think of exposing her a second time.

On the appointed evening I returned to Hailesbury with a small dressing-bag, prepared to stay the night.

The housekeeper had prepared a bedroom for me on one of the upper floors, not far from her own. But as she told me that the ghostly tapping usually began about midnight, I decided to sit up for it, and persuaded her to do the same.

We had supper together in a room downstairs, the old lady getting it ready herself. Not a girl in the village, it appeared, could be induced to remain in the house after sunset.

After supper Mrs. Musgrave nodded off to sleep in a rocking-chair before the fire, while I lit a cigar and waited in some excitement for what was to come.

The room in which we sat was wainscotted, like all those on the ground floor. Every time a coal dropped from the fire, or a window-frame rattled, I fancied the mysterious summons had come, and started nervously in my chair.

I believe it is not merely fancy which causes us to hear so many more small noises in a house at night than in the day time, but that there is some scientific reason for it. Be that as it may, everyone must admit that the sense of hearing is more acute in the darkness than in the light.

As twelve o'clock approached I deliberately turned the lamp out, keeping a candle and some matches by my side.

Hardly had I done this when I received a shock which nearly made me jump out of my chair. It was a tap—loud, sharp, and imperative—on the door of the room.

In my agitation the habitual phrase, "Come in," rose to my lips, and I uttered it. At the same moment my companion woke with a start, and stared about her wildly in the dim firelight.

"Did you hear It?" she asked in an awe-struck whisper.

"Yes. Did you?"

As she nodded in answer, the tap sounded a second time, seeming fainter and further off.

I rose to my feet, and lit the candle.

"Are you going to follow It?" the old woman breathed.

"Yes; will you come?"

She shook her head.

"I dare not. Give me the matches! Don't go till I have lit the lamp, for my sake!"

I lingered, my own nerves becoming affected in sympathy with hers, while the frightened woman clutched the box from my hand, and struck a match, which she applied to the wick of the lamp.

At the same moment I heard the Tap for the third time, low, and fading away in the distance.

I strode to the door of the room, opened it, and passed out into the passage, leaving the door ajar.

The ghostly Tap sounded again far away in front of me, at the foot of the great staircase.

I strode after It, with quickening steps and throbbing pulses, carefully screening the candle flame with one hand. It moved on up the stairs, seeming to fly before me, and I almost raced to catch up that beckoning sound.

Along the main corridor overhead I was drawn, straight to the door of the death-chamber.

As I crossed the threshold, and the huge four-poster loomed up in the shadow, the character of the ghostly sound underwent a change.

Instead of a single tap, travelling with the speed of a terrified man fleeing from pursuit, it became a hurried knocking, moving round the room behind the wainscot as if in search of something. I could have sworn that Someone or Something was *feeling its way along*.

The daunting sounds arrived at the middle of the wall opposite the foot of the great bed, and became stationary.

Once—twice—thrice—that awful Tap broke the silence, louder and more menacing each time.

And then all at once the flame of the candle turned blue and went out, leaving me in the stillness and the darkness, with the feeling that I was *not alone*.

How I got downstairs again I can hardly remember, but I am not ashamed to say that never was sight more welcome than the lamp-light streaming through the open door on to the passage as I rushed towards it.

Mrs. Musgrave gave me a glance, and screamed:

"You have seen It?"

"No, no," I said, "but the light went out, and I had no matches."

I related my experience in a few words, and then made a confession.

"I cannot sleep in this house to-night, Mrs. Musgrave. I must go down to the village and try to get into the inn."

To my relief she offered no opposition. I fancy I was not the first person who had left her at the same hour for the same reason.

Not even in the morning did I feel inclined to return to the haunted house. I went up to London by the first train, and, going straight to the office, asked Miss Sargent to come into my room, and told her everything.

She listened with intense interest, not interrupting by so much as a movement till I had come to the end.

Then she said with grave decision:

"You must let me go down and spend a night in that room, Mr. Hargreaves."

"Don't think of such a thing!" I exclaimed. "I should never permit you to run the risk of such a shock as I had last night."

"It is a matter of necessity," Miss Sargent replied firmly. "It is a matter of duty. I cannot doubt that the tapping on the wainscot has a meaning. It is a message from the dead."

"A message! I don't understand."

"I don't profess to understand it myself at present. But I do not believe that it is an ordinary case of what is called haunting, where a spirit appears to be bound in some way to a particular spot. Neither do I believe that the object of this manifestation has been to drive the new owner of the house away, or to render it uninhabitable."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"I feel sure there is a reason for the taps always coming back to one particular place on the wall of that one room."

A light seemed to break on her mind as she spoke, and she added quickly:

"I should not wonder if there were something hidden behind the wainscot, perhaps a will or a paper of some kind."

I recalled what the housekeeper had told me about the adopted child of the dead man, turned adrift so heartlessly by the heir to his wealth.

"Pray Heaven you are right!" I ejaculated fervently. "I will go down again and have the wainscot removed. But, mind, this must be kept a strict secret. If Sir Henry Weet-

man or his solicitors heard what I was doing, I might get into serious trouble."

Out of gratitude for Miss Sargent's suggestion, I invited her to be present at the opening of the wainscot. I had confided my hopes and intentions to Mrs. Mus-

grave, who was intensely excited at the prospect of justice being done to her beloved young mistress.

"To think that I should never have guessed what it meant!" she cried. "And I thought I understood it better than anyone else, too."

"Did you think there was any reason for the tapping on that particular

spot, then?" Miss Sargent asked.

"To be sure I did. That is just where Miss Alice's picture used to hang, so that Sir Christopher could see it every morning when he woke. Sir Henry had the picture sold with all the others, and I thought that was why Sir Christopher couldn't rest in his grave."

I saw a look of disappointment steal over Miss Sargent's face.

"It may be that Mrs. Musgrave is right," she said thoughtfully. "Very often the spirits



As I crossed the threshold, and the huge four-poster loomed up in the shadow, the . . . ghostly sound underwent a change.

seem to have very little motive—or what seems very little to us—for what they do.”

“Well, we shall see,” I responded, not willing to give up my hope on the poor orphan’s behalf.

I had brought down an expert cabinet-maker from London, and he went to work quickly and neatly. A great space of the wall was stripped of its wainscot, and we searched anxiously for any sign of a hiding-place behind.

We searched vainly. To the bitter disappointment of all three of us there was not even a vestige, not so much as a scratch on

the wall, to indicate that anything had ever been concealed there.

To complete our discomfiture the cabinet-maker gave it as his opinion that the wainscot had never been disturbed since it was put up in the reign of James I.

“I was right, you see, Miss,” said good Mrs. Musgrave sorrowfully. “It’s the thought of Miss Alice’s picture that keeps Sir Christopher out of his grave.”

She spoke as though the deceased baronet were an invalid suffering from sleeplessness at night.

Miss Sargent shook her head, but said nothing. She seemed to be reflecting deeply.

We left the cabinet-maker with strict instructions to replace the wainscot, so as to leave no trace of his operations, and went downstairs.

Half-an-hour later, as we were sitting at lunch, Miss Sargent suddenly spoke.

“You must let me sleep in that bed, Mr. Hargreaves. I am a clairvoyant in sleep, as you know, and I may see something which will explain the mystery.”

We both returned to town in the afternoon to make our arrangements. The following day we came down again, prepared to spend the night.

None of us intended to go to bed. The four-poster in the haunted room had been furnished with blankets and pillows to serve as a bed for the clairvoyant. Mrs. Musgrave was to instal herself on a sofa before the fireplace, in which a fire had been lit, and I was to sit up in the next room, ready to come at the first call.

Miss Sargent, who fortunately possessed the power of falling asleep at will, retired to her strange couch a little before eleven, accompanied by



She was sitting half up in bed . . . appearing to stare with the most deadly fear at the opposite wall.

the housekeeper, whose excitement promised to keep her awake.

As for myself, I cherished no wish to sleep. I had provided myself with lights, cigars, and a book to read, but I am bound to confess that I found it impossible to get interested in it.

An hour later I heard a low tapping on the door of my own room.

Not a little startled, I sprang up, only to find that the sound this time was free from any element of mystery.

The old housekeeper had come to summon me.

"Will you come and see the young lady?" she said. "I think something is the matter." I felt myself turning cold.

"What do you mean? Has the tapping begun?"

The answer surprised me.

"No, that is what frightens me. This is the first night I have not heard it for four months. But I think Miss Sargent sees something."

I led the way into the haunted room. There was not a sound to be heard, and the lights had been put out by the clairvoyant's desire. But she was sitting half up in bed, her eyes fast closed, and yet appearing to stare with the most deadly fear at the opposite wall.

Suddenly a sharp cry broke from her, followed immediately by the same frantic rush of half-articulated syllables which had so alarmed me on that night in the Green House.

"Leave—it—alone—leave—it—alone—leave—it—alone—put—it—back—put—it—back—put—it—back—*Ah, he's taken it!*"

With these last words, uttered loudly in distinct tones, the sleeper's eyes suddenly opened, and she gave a fearful shudder.

Tap! tap! tap!

If ever I have heard any sounds in my life I heard those knocks by an unseen hand on the wainscot at which we all gazed, unable to stir till the knocks ceased.

It was too much for the nerves of any of us to bear. I caught the half-fainting girl in my arms as she threw herself from the great four-poster, and the three of us did not breathe again till we were safe in the housekeeper's little sitting-room downstairs.

There, after she had rested and taken a soothing draught prescribed by the housekeeper, Miss Sargent related her vision.

"I saw a picture hanging on the wall, the

picture of a young girl, about seventeen, with blue eyes and very light golden hair."

"Miss Alice!" the old lady interrupted.

"Two men came into the room, and moved about. I could not see what they were doing. Presently, one of them, who was in his shirt-sleeves, and looked like a work-



"At that instant I saw suddenly, appearing . . . in front of the picture, a corpse."

man, approached the picture, and raised his hands to take it down."

"One of the auctioneer's men, my dear," was Mrs. Musgrave's murmured comment.

"At that instant I saw suddenly, appearing from nowhere, in front of the picture, a corpse."

"A corpse!" we both ejaculated in horror.

"Yes, a dead man, in a winding sheet, with his head swathed in white bandages. The corpse seemed to try to thrust back

the living man. He went on without noticing it, and took down the picture, I can hardly describe how, but just as though the corpse were not there. The dead man seemed to try to detain him, but he walked off with it. Then I awoke."

A cry burst from the poor old house-keeper.

"It was my poor master," she moaned, "trying to save Miss Alice's nice picture."

The other said nothing, but bent her brows as though profoundly dissatisfied with this seemingly puerile interpretation of the mystery.

I watched her with expectation. I had come to look on Alwyne Sargent as a woman of more than ordinary powers of mind, apart altogether from her extraordinary occult faculty, and I confidently anticipated that she would not let the matter rest there.

"The picture must be replaced," she said, after a long interval of meditation. "We cannot leave things as they are. At all costs the picture must be found, and hung up there again, if it is only for one night."

"I should think that could be managed," I said, though I did not much relish the idea.

I saw that Miss Sargent wanted to make fresh trial of her clairvoyant powers, with the picture in its place, and I dreaded the injury which these agitating experiences seemed likely to do her.

However, I shared her feeling that the mystery must be probed to the bottom. The

very next day I called on the auctioneers who had charge of the sale at Hailesbury Manor, and asked them to let me go through their books. I told them nothing except that I had been asked to recover a family portrait included in the sale by oversight.

They were very obliging, and with their assistance I found that a picture catalogued

as "Portrait of a Girl" had been sold for £12 to a gentleman living at Sydenham.

I went out there the same evening, and saw the purchaser, who was a Common Councilman of the City of London, and evidently given to speculating in pictures, with which the house was crowded.

He saw his advantage, and drove a rather hard bargain with me, but in the end he agreed to let me have the picture to show to the client whom I pretended to have in the background, on my paying a deposit.

Then he led me upstairs to a small smoking-room, where I saw the picture hanging in an obscure corner.

With hands trembling with excitement, I took hold of the frame to lift it off the nail. As I did so, the nail itself gave way, and the precious portrait crashed to the ground, the frame coming in pieces.

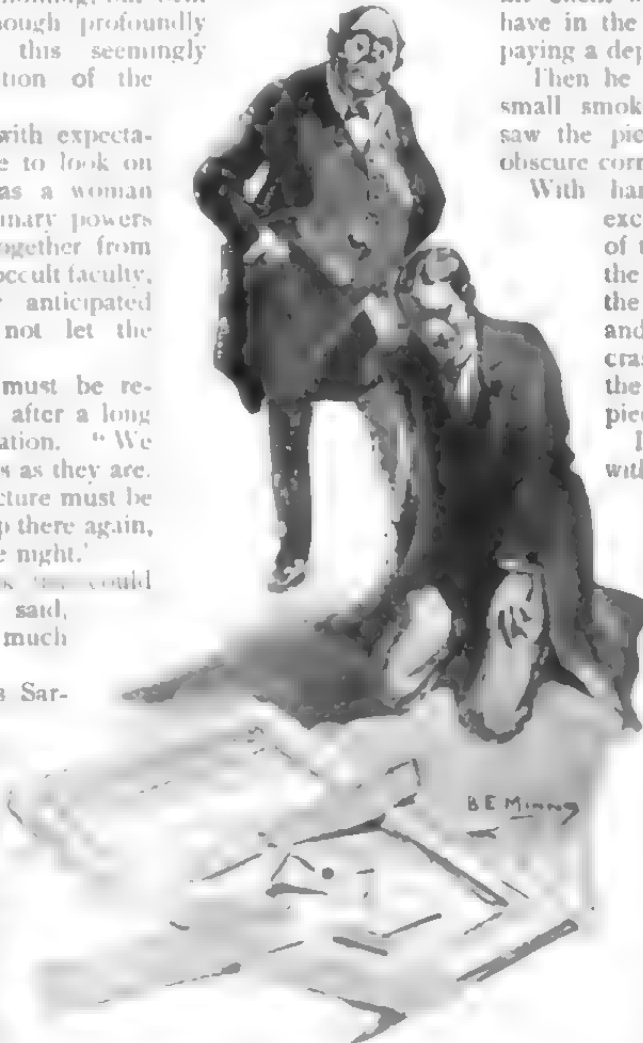
I fell on my knees with a cry of dismay, when I was astonished to see, among the broken portions of the frame, a blue foolscap envelope indorsed in shaky handwriting—*"Will of Sir C. Weetman, Bart."*

The will gave the whole of his property to his adopted daughter, Alice Weetman.

Human nature is a curious thing. As soon as I had made out the contents of the document thus miraculously discovered, and he knew that the picture was

that of a young lady who had come into a great fortune, the owner insisted on my accepting it as a free gift for the fortunate heiress.

It now hangs, in its carefully restored frame, in its old place at the foot of the historic bed; and the tapping on the wainscot in Hailesbury Manor has been heard no more.



I was astonished to see . . . a blue foolscap envelope.



BY ALLEN UPWARD.

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III.—THE SECRET OF HORNER'S COURT.

I HAD by this time acquired quite a reputation in business circles as a buyer and investigator of houses reputed to be haunted.

The transactions I made were usually very profitable, since, as the agents were unable to either let or sell the ghost-ridden property which they desired me to purchase, I was able to secure it on favourable terms.

Miss Sargent, my lady secretary, who possessed the gift of clairvoyance, was of great assistance in probing mysteries connected with haunted mansions.

Not long after the fortunate ending of the adventure at Hailesbury Manor, I was approached by one of the leading firms of house-agents in the West-end with reference to another haunted house.

Horner's Court, as this place was called, had been on the books of the firm for many years, but they had been unable to find either a tenant or a purchaser for it on account of its reputation.

The partner who called on me described it as a well-built eighteenth century house, situated in a northern county, on the outskirts of a famous forest. Two dukes lived in the immediate neighbourhood, so that the house ought to have fetched almost a fancy price from one of that numerous class who appreciate high Society.

But, for some reason or other, no one seemed willing to take to the place.

I listened to all Mr. Roseveare had to say, and asked if he could tell me anything definite about the prejudice or superstition which affected the house.

He shook his head.

"I can tell you nothing. It was placed in our hands by the trustees of the estate—I don't even remember whether they are acting for a minor, or how the property stands."

"Nor who occupied the house last, I suppose."

"A widow, I believe; a woman of rank—Lady Something or Other. She gave it up on her marriage to a second husband. Perhaps it is haunted by the ghost of the first," Mr. Roseveare added jocularly.

I smiled out of politeness, though I had ceased to look upon these subjects as matter for jest.

A business discussion followed, and it ended by my securing an option to buy the property on such nominal terms that if I could rid it of its disagreeable character I stood to make a very substantial sum indeed.

As soon as the understanding was reached, I called in Miss Sargent, and dictated its terms for her to type.

Mr. Roseveare was evidently struck by her name.

"May I venture to ask if this is the young

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lady who discovered the secret of the Green House?" he said respectfully.

I introduced him formally, not very well pleased with his presumption. Naturally, I did not wish the most valuable assistant in our office to be too friendly with a rival firm.

"What a perfectly charming girl!" was his exclamation, as Miss Sargent quietly withdrew to make her transcript. "I quite envy you, my dear sir."

"We find Miss Sargent competent, and loyal to her employers, and we do not look beyond," I returned, intensely annoyed.

Mr. Roseveare said nothing in reply, but he smiled in a way which I found it hard, as a business man, to bear.

"Well, I will send you round a copy of the agreement as soon as it is ready for signature," I said, as a broad hint for him to go. I was determined not to give him another chance of annoying my secretary.

"I am afraid you will not send it by Miss Sargent," he retorted rather vulgarly and maliciously, as he put on his hat and departed.

As I foresaw would be the case, Miss Sargent lost no time in applying for permission to aid me in investigating the mystery of Horner's Court.

The happy issue of our last adventure of the kind made it difficult for me to raise any objection. I had come to see, moreover, that, however great the strain upon her in her clairvoyant state, her experiences seemed to have no after effects of an injurious kind.

Accordingly, I arranged with her that if, on arriving at the scene of action, I found that there was any suggestion of an occult influence at work, I would summon her at once.

I went down two days later, the agreement with Roseveare & Grimston having been signed meanwhile, not without some further remarks by Mr. Roseveare which it would be childish on my part to record.

I arrived at a wayside station towards dusk on an autumn day, and was driven for miles along a misty road strewn with yellowing leaves, till I saw in front a great iron gate thrown back and rusting on its hinges.

Through this opening the dog-cart drove, and brought me along an avenue of black and naked trees to a gaunt house that stood and frowned at its own reflection in a dreary, reed-grown pool.

I caught my breath at the sight—I could not tell why—and when I had dismounted from the dog-cart I stood on the weather-stained steps in front of the door, and felt a

sense of reluctance at the thought of pulling that great, iron bell-handle and passing under that forbidding doorway.

With a shiver I mounted the steps and rang. The door was opened by a man—a man of a lowering, distrustful countenance, which told me at the first glance that it would not be his fault if a tenant were ever found for Horner's Court.

It seemed to me that I should learn more from this man if I concealed the true character in which I came, and let him suppose that I was acting for another.

Handing him my bag, I let him take me through the dark and dreary hall, lit only by a solitary candle, into a vast dining-room, almost equally dark and cheerless.

Some logs had been heaped in the grate, and as we came in a woman was putting a match to the small twigs underneath.

She looked up at me with a nervous glance of dread, and in that look I read that she knew the secret of Horner's Court—and that she would never dare to tell it to me.

Very few words passed between us, and those chiefly about supper. I bade the man show me my bedroom, and he took me up to a room on the floor above—a room whose windows looked directly on the dismal pool.

"Is this the haunted room?" I asked, with an affectation of levity which I was very far from feeling.

The man raised his head and stared at me.

"No, sir, it ain't. That room's the other side of the house, and if you take my advice you won't go near it except by daylight."

For that night, at all events, I was glad to accept his warning.

At dinner, if the rough meal set before me could be so called, I was waited on by the forbidding retainer, whose manner checked all attempts to draw him into conversation.

I could only glean that he had come to Horner's Court as a caretaker on the departure of Lady Maria Cruikshank, as the last tenant was named by him. No doubt the berth was an easy one, and he would resent having to make way for a new occupier. Inwardly I made up my mind to dismiss him as soon as possible.

He was obscure, intentionally obscure, I thought, on the subject of the supernatural visitings.

"I never seen nothing myself, so I can't say," he intimated darkly. "But I seen the faces of them what has seen something, and that was enough for me."

"And your wife, has she seen anything?" I asked.

"Don't you get speaking to Mrs. Stokes about it," he broke out abruptly. "She's half crazy already, and it wouldn't take much more to drive her clean off her head."

I sipped my glass of port in silence. Stokes had brought up an old cobwebbed bottle from the cellar, where a few yet lingered from former times. I filled another glass and gave it to the man.

"Drink that, and tell me what your wife has seen, if you don't want me to question her."

Fixing suspicious eyes on me, he lifted the glass and slowly drained it to the last drop.

"She says — well, she says as how she have seen a child."

"A child!"

"Aye. Leastways the sperrit of one, I reckon she means. Happen you don't believe in they sperrits, sir?"

His curious eyes sought to read mine. I shook my head.

"Is there any tradition connected with this house? Any rumour of a crime or tragedy?"

A sullen flush, I thought, rose on his countenance — it might have been the wine.

"Crime? Did you say crime, sir? No, there ain't never been no crime committed in Horner's Court. Lady Maria Freer and her like aren't the sort what commits crimes, are they?"

He spoke with a certain rude insolence which somehow seemed put on deliberately.

"Just now you called her Lady Cruikshank," I said thoughtfully, casting my eyes down, as though I disclaimed to question him.

His secret fears came uppermost, and got the better of his rudeness.

"She married Colonel Cruikshank when



The door was opened by a man . . . of a lowering, distrustful countenance.

she left here," he said, fawning all at once.

"How long was she here before that?"

"I don't know."

It was a lie, of course, and, like most of the lies told by ignorant cunning, a useless one. Ladies of high rank — and the style of this one showed that she could not be less than an earl's daughter — are easily traced.

A night spent in the haunted house told me

nothing more. Surely the shivering miasma of the stagnant pool beneath my window was the evil influence that wrought against the place? When I rose in the early morning and saw the wreaths of dank mist enfolding the walls like a white shroud, I asked myself if any other ghost were needed.

So at breakfast I said aloud, and half-unconsciously:

"I will have the pool drained."

The gloomy man overheard me, and a look of anger came into his eyes. No doubt he feared that his reign was near its end.

"There's nought wrong with the mere," he muttered.

I looked him in the face.

"I shall return here in three days' time. Send your wife to me. I have an order to give her."

He looked at me as if he would have liked to disobey, but dared not, and shuffled out of the room.

When the woman appeared she was trembling, and her eyes were steadily turned to the ground.

I rose to my feet.

"Take me to the haunted room," I said briefly.

I would not trust the husband with my intention. The woman, thus taken unprepared, shuddered, but made no protest. She led the way upstairs to a remote wing overlooking a small garden.

The room was rather sad in its neglect, but not depressing. On the walls I saw some coloured prints, such as are sold at Christmas time with the illustrated papers.

"Who used this room in Lady Maria's time?" I asked, stealing a glance at the distressed creature.

"I don't know."

It was the husband's answer, no doubt repeated by his order.

"The house is haunted by a child's ghost. This looks as if it might have been a nursery," I prompted.

The woman turned very pale, but made no motion.

"Had she a child? And did he die here, in this room? And were there any circumstances—dark and dreadful circumstances?"

I was proceeding earnestly when all at once the woman threw up her hands, and, uttering low moans, tottered out of the room.

I passed her in the corridor, and stopped to whisper in her ear—for I knew not where her husband might lurk:

"I shall return here with a lady who can

read the secrets of the dead. Have this room ready for her to pass the night in, and prepare the adjoining room for me."

I thought she would have taken my words as a threat. But she lifted her eyes to mine imploringly, and I just heard her breathe, "Thank Heaven!"

When I went down to Horner's Court with Alwyne Sargent, we did not go alone. An experienced nurse accompanied her, and I brought down, in the disguise of a valet, one of the shrewdest and most determined officers of Scotland Yard.

A "Peerage" had disclosed that Lady Maria Cruikshank was sister to the Earl of Gays-thorpe, and that her present residence was in Florence, Italy. Private inquiries added the information that she was the mother of one son, by her former husband. The boy was now seventeen, and travelling with a tutor.

When we arrived at Horner's Court, the caretaker received us with the same discourteous air. His wife, he told us, was unwell, but a woman had come up from the neighbouring farm to attend to us.

The police officer, by virtue of his supposed position, assumed the right of penetrating into the servants' quarters of the mansion. I followed Miss Sargent and the nurse upstairs, whither the woman led them.

The first glance round the room prepared for their reception showed me that it was not the one which I had formerly explored.

Yet it was like it. Even the very pictures seemed the same. Only, when I passed into the next room, and saw it artfully heaped up with lumber, did I feel sure that the substitution was intentional.

I questioned the woman, who told me truthfully enough, I have no doubt, that she knew nothing of the interior arrangements of the house.

I considered what it was best for me to do, and came to the conclusion that it would not be wise to let the man Stokes know that I had detected his deceit. He might have other tricks in reserve, for it was evidently his object to throw every obstacle in the way of our discovering the mystery of Horner's Court.

I let the woman believe that I was satisfied. But as soon as I found myself alone with the other two, I told them how things stood.

We arranged that when the time came to retire, a bed of some kind should be rigged up for Miss Sargent in the true haunted room. The nurse did not intend to go to sleep, but to keep watch over the clairvoyant.

The detective, whom we had left down-

stairs, was informed of my discovery, and concurred in what had been arranged. His manner showed him to be sceptical of Miss Sargent's powers, but he had come already to the conclusion that Stokes was hiding some secret of a highly doubtful character. He agreed, with some apparent hesitation, to share our watch.

The caretaker seemed to hover uneasily through our part of the mansion as long as he dared. As we sat in the dining-room we heard him locking and bolting the great hall door with infinite precaution.

"That man is certainly afraid of something," the police-officer remarked.

"Whether he really thinks the house is haunted or not, he dreads some accidental discovery."

After this search we all went upstairs. Miss Sargent's couch was made up for her in the room half-choked with lumber. The nurse carried in an arm-chair for herself, to sit beside the sleeping girl. The detective and I took seats into the corridor, ready in case the man we both suspected should come prowling along in the night.

The detective, Mayhew, declares that he saw nothing, was aware of nothing strange or uncanny happening that night. But he says that he saw me shiver and turn pale without visible cause.

All at once I heard a sound from the other side. Before I could gather what it was, I felt my hair stir and rise, and

at the same moment the door was softly opened.

Alwyne Sargent stood on the threshold, her face drawn with wonder and dismay, and her eyes fixed in the unseeing gaze I had learnt to know and dread.



"Take me to the haunted room," I said briefly.

Behind her I discerned the figure of the nurse with finger uplifted.

"Do not wake her, for your life!" she warned me. "The shock might endanger her reason. We must follow where she goes."

By this time Mayhew had risen to his



I sprang forward . . . Just in time to throw my arms round her as she reached the brink.

feet, an expression of amazement on his face.

The somnambulist stepped out into the corridor and moved slowly down it in the direction from which my fear had seemed to come.

The three of us stole after her on tiptoe, scarcely daring to breathe.

She led the way without hesitating downstairs into the hall. There she halted for a

moment, as though uncertain which way to turn. But her hesitation was quickly over; she turned away from the main door, and made her way first into a drawing-room, and thence into a conservatory with a glass door at the end leading into the grounds.

There was barely light enough for us to follow her without stumbling against the furniture and the wooden shelves in the glasshouse. But the sleeper moved on surely, without a mistake.

She reached the glass door some way in advance of us, and we heard her turn the handle. Then there was a low, desolate cry,

and she shook fiercely at the unyielding door.

Mayhew and I darted forward. The door was locked, and the key had been taken away.

"This is some of that rascal's work," the detective muttered. "May I break the lock?"

By this time whatever scepticism he may have felt had evaporated in the excitement of the quest, and he was as eager as myself to see the end.

"Yes, break it," I said.

He dashed his foot against the flimsy door, and it burst away from its fastenings.

The shock produced no effect on the somnambulist, but she put out her hands and groped as though to ascertain if the obstacle had been removed. Then she heaved a sigh of relief, and passed out on to the lawn.

Turning to the right, she followed a winding path, which led down to the edge of the stagnant pool. I quickened my steps to come up with her, determined at all costs to prevent her falling into the water.

As if conscious of my intention, she hastened on till her walk became a run. I

sprang forward, and was just in time to throw my arms round her as she reached the brink and threw out her hands in a gesture of supplication or despair.

Then, even as I held her rigid form, I did not hear, but I *knew* of a splash far out in the middle of the water, and a deep, silent ripple that slowly passed across the surface of the pool.

Neither of our companions saw or heard anything.

After an instant's agonised struggle, the somnambulist awoke in my arms, crying hysterically. The nurse advanced hastily, and took her from me, soothing her, and turning her step back towards the house.

As we neared the conservatory door the police-officer uttered an exclamation and darted forward.

He told me afterwards he was certain he had seen the face of Stokes peering out with a look of no common fear. But the man was not to be found.

"I will have the mere dragged the first thing to-morrow," I declared. I remembered now the aversion shown by Stokes at my former proposal to drain the dismal pool.

The rest of the night passed off without incident; but in the morning the woman who had been waiting upon us came and made the surprising announcement that the caretaker was nowhere to be found.

Both he and his wife had fled from the house and from the neighbourhood without a word of explanation; and neither of them has ever been heard of since. It was only possible to suppose that the man had been drawing a secret allowance so long as the mystery of Horner's Court remained undiscovered, and that what he had seen on this night had convinced him that the game was up, and that he would be safer out of the way.

As soon as the necessary appliances could be obtained, the pool was dragged opposite the spot where the somnambulist had stood.

Horrible to relate, the drag brought up the skeleton of a child of about seven years of age.

As soon as the detective Mayhew saw this tragic evidence, he made up his mind that a serious crime had been committed. The subsequent investigation was conducted by him, and I need only tell briefly its result.

Inquiries in the neighbourhood brought out that Lady Maria Freer was the mother of a boy of seven or eight at the time of her engagement to Colonel Cruikshank. The Colonel seemed to dislike the boy; and his

mother, who was a heartless Society woman, left him entirely to the care of servants, while she gave herself up to hunting and other amusements in the company of her future husband.

On her second marriage she had quitted Horner's Court for the honeymoon, not to return. The little boy did not appear at the wedding, and it was given out that he had been sent on in the charge of a governess to the place which his parents had chosen as their future residence.

Armed with this information, the detective called on the trustees of the late Mr. Freer, whose heir the boy was.

From them he learnt the important fact that under the provisions of the will the whole income of the estate during the boy's minority was payable to the widow. On the boy's coming of age, or death during infancy, her income was reduced to the widow's third.

Lady Maria was regularly receiving the full income from the trustees, who had not the faintest suspicion of anything being wrong.

Mayhew, who felt pretty sure that the story of the lad of seventeen and the travelling tutor was a myth, obtained a letter from the trustees to Lady Maria Cruikshank, calling for the immediate production of the heir, and went to Florence to deliver it in person.

The wicked mother, thus taken unawares, showed more fear than remorse. She made a confession, which the detective was content to accept as probably near the truth.

The boy had died in the room at Horner's Court; and if his death had not been wholly due to neglect, at least his life might have been prolonged by the care and devotion of a mother who really loved her child. Unwilling to lose the greater part of her income, to which she owed the prospect of a second husband, the heartless woman had concealed the state of her son's health from everyone but the two Stokes, and when the poor child died, she had paid Stokes to dispose of the body in the pool in front of the house. Her plan was to draw the income of the estate up to the last moment, and then send a certificate of her son's death from some foreign place where a doctor could easily be bribed.

The trustees forbore to prosecute, but I am glad to say that they firmly refused to pay another penny to Colonel Cruikshank's wife till the whole of the sum she had fraudulently obtained had been stopped out of her lawful dower; and when last heard of the pair were living in abject poverty.

Horner's Court has become the residence of the High Sheriff of ———shire.



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IV.—THE TWO ROSES.

It would give needless pain to members of the family who are still living in the neighbourhood if I were to go into the circumstances in which the ancient seat of the Hedges, of Essex, came into the market.

It is only necessary to say that the solicitors from whom my firm received instructions to find a purchaser for the estate were not acquainted with the family history, and could tell us nothing definite on the subject of the incidents, real or imaginary, which had given an evil reputation to Bewley Hall.

They were only able to inform us that one entire wing of the building, constituting the most ancient and characteristic portion, had been shut up for a great length of time, so long, indeed, that no one seemed able to remember when it had last been inhabited.

I discussed the matter with Miss Alwyne Sargent, the young lady employed in our office, who had already given me such valuable assistance on similar occasions.

She possessed the gift of clairvoyance and had proved of incalculable assistance in explaining away mysteries connected with several residences.

These were notably the Green House, Wallington, Hailesbury Manor, and Horner's Court.

I had already become well known as a dealer in haunted property, and made a satisfactory profit on my transactions, buying the premises cheap, and selling at a profit when the mysteries were cleared up.

I was reluctant to expose her to the risk of another nervous shock, although she herself was quite eager to take her usual part in our joint investigations. I thought, however, it could do no harm for her to come down with me to make some preliminary inquiries.

None of the furniture and effects had yet been removed from the mansion, and there was a farm bailiff occupying rooms with his family in the servants' quarter, so that it was easy to arrange for a visit.

The rather senseless difficulty of a chaperon for my lady clerk was disposed of by my sister Jane, who surprised me by requesting that she might make one of the party. Jane had not previously met Miss Sargent, but she had heard me speak of her once or twice, and appeared anxious for some reason to make her acquaintance.

I was a little disappointed to find that Alwyne did not seem equally eager to meet my sister. In fact, she went so far as to say that she felt nervous at the prospect. I could only assure her that my sister Jane was a most unassuming, ordinary person, quiet, shrewd, and observant, and, moreover, devoted to me. But this information did not allay Miss Sargent's apprehensions, which seemed to increase as the moment for our departure drew near.

The ceremony of introduction took place on the platform at Liverpool Street. Both ladies, I thought, were more carefully dressed than seemed necessary for a purely business

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journey, on which we were to meet no one of any consequence. I caught a look of surprise on my sister's face as Alwyne came up, and she took the first opportunity to whisper to me, almost in a tone of reproach: "Jack I you never told us she was a beauty!"

"Miss Sargent is a valued member of our clerical staff," I replied severely. "Her looks are no concern of ours so long as they do not interfere with her faithful discharge of her duties in the office."

Jane looked dissatisfied, but she did not venture on any further remark. During the journey down she watched the poor girl as closely as a cat watches a canary bird through the bars of its cage. Fortunately Miss Sargent soon got over her first nervousness, and exerted herself to conciliate my sister with such good effect that by the time we reached Saffron Walden we were all chatting like old friends. Jane rather embarrassed me by forgetting the business relationship between Miss Sargent and myself, and referring to me repeatedly by my Christian name, so that I was rather glad that my partner, Mortimer, was not present.

We found Bewley Hall to be an ancient manor house of the Elizabethan type, built of red brick, which was mellowed by age, and overgrown in many places with ivy and climbing plants. The principal feature was a large and lofty hall, on much the same design as the London Guildhall, but on a smaller scale. It was stone-paved, and was panelled halfway up the walls with very valuable old oak.

The hall, I must explain, separated the two wings or halves composing the mansion. The modern portion, which had been in constant use up to the death of the late owner, had been built on to the great hall at its lower end. The haunted wing, if it should be so called, was connected with the upper end.

Here there was a dais, also paved with stone, stretching from side to side of the hall. The door into the ancient wing opened off one side of the dais, and on the opposite side was another smaller door, like a postern, which we found led into a little rose garden behind the house.

The only other feature that I need dwell on was a gallery, which the bailiff's wife, who showed us over the place, called the musicians' gallery. It overlooked the dais, facing the door into the rose garden, and when we went upstairs we found it was approached by a corridor that traversed the whole length of the haunted wing.

The woman who acted as our guide was very

uncommunicative, partly, I believe, because she really had heard very little, and partly because she fancied that she would lower herself in our eyes by betraying any interest in the lore of superstition.

When I asked her if she could tell us anything about the ghost, she tossed her head in disdain.

"I don't know of any ghost," she declared, "and I don't hold with any talk about such things. It's only the labourers that believes in them hereabouts."

The social cleavage thus indicated forbade further inquiry. The bailiff's wife informed us, however, that the disused part of the mansion had been shut up long before she was born, and she made a great deal of difficulty about letting us spend the night in it.

"It's all dust and cobwebs," she explained to me. "Everything there is exactly as it was left a hundred years ago and more, I should say. Your ladies couldn't possibly put up with the dirt and the damp."

We explored the wing under her guidance, and its appearance served to confirm her account. The old hangings clung mouldering to the walls; ancient weapons grown rusty with neglect were suspended along the sides of the corridor; in the bedrooms old four-poster beds were covered with the embroidered quilts of another age, and the robes and brocades of a past generation still filled the closets.

Even my staid and demure sister could not resist the temptation to rummage in some of the cupboards and examine the decayed fineries they contained, while I felt no less strongly attracted by the fine specimens of seventeenth and eighteenth century arms. I found that one superbly mounted pistol which I took down from its place actually had the left barrel still loaded, though the priming had long since disappeared.

Alwyne approached me as I was examining the pistol, and I showed her the flints still in the hammers. She regarded the weapon with peculiar attention, taking it in her hand with a meditative, musing look.

"I wonder how the other barrel came to be discharged," she said.

So far we had been able to glean nothing from the impenetrable obstinacy of our guide. After selecting our rooms, which the woman reluctantly promised to provide with some bedding from the other part of the house, we came back into the great hall.

I have already mentioned the dais which occupied one end, with the two doors opening off it. Across the dais there extended an

ancient table, long and narrow, made of a single beam of oak.

Someone threw out the suggestion that we three should dine at this seigneurial board, in imitation of the olden time.

When I requested the bailiff's wife to make the necessary arrangements, she exhibited some slight dismay.

"Of course it's for you to do as you wish, sir," she said. "But perhaps your ladies don't know that this is the table that has the bloodstain on it."

We seized eagerly upon this allusion.

"What bloodstain?—where?" we demanded, crowding round the black and venerable board.

The woman pointed to the end of the table nearest to the door into the rose garden. Surely enough the wood seemed to have a darker tinge at one particular spot. The mark was about the size of a man's hand.

"Is there a story about this stain?" I asked, hoping to get upon the track of the ghostly legend of the Hall.

But the woman could not, or would not, be drawn.

"It's an old secret in the family, I've heard, how the stain got there. I don't rightly call to mind what it was, but I do think there was a murder in the Hall. Some say it was a hundred years ago, and some two hundred, and the murderer was Sir William Hedges.

"But anyway the table hasn't been used from that day to this, and the family never would have it touched."

Miss Sargent showed herself intensely interested in this account, scanty as it was.

"Who knows that there may not be some sympathetic force concentrated in this particular spot," she said reflectively. "I think that instead of our dining here, and possibly disturbing the magnetism of the table, it will be better for us to try to hold a séance here at night."

Although my recent experiences had cured me of a good deal of scepticism with regard to the occult, I still draw the line at ordinary spirit-rapping. I hinted as much to Alwyne.

"That is not exactly what I meant," she explained. "I am not a medium in that sense. I merely believe it possible that if I can establish a magnetic rapport with this table I may feel some direction given to me which will help us."

My sister, I could see, was a good deal puzzled by this mystic language. In the end, however, Miss Sargent had her way.

We dined and spent the first part of the evening in the modern side of the building,

and then adjourned about ten o'clock to the dark and echoing hall.

We placed ourselves round the end of the table, which bore the faded mark of blood, and extinguished the candles we had brought with us. It was a bright moonlight night, and the white rays that streamed in on us through a huge mullioned window filled the hall with shadows that were startling in their distinctness.

Whether because of this brightness, or from any other cause, our sitting had no immediate results. If Miss Sargent were susceptible to any influence, magnetic or otherwise, this was evidently not the right occasion for it.

After a quarter of an hour passed in silence, she rose suddenly from the table with a sigh, and announced her intention of retiring to sleep.

"It is only when I am asleep that I seem to be sensitive," she remarked. "I do not know how it is; this spot fascinates me, and yet if I sat here all night I don't believe anything would happen."

I allowed the two ladies to go upstairs by themselves. The old hall fascinated me by its emptiness and silence, and I paced up and down on the paved floor smoking a cigar, and pondering a certain question which my sister's attitude towards Alwyne had forced me to look in the face.

How long was I going to allow Alwyne Sargent to hazard her nerves, and possibly her brain, in these uncanny experiments? I asked myself the question, no longer as it concerned the clerk in our office on whom I depended, but as it concerned the girl who, stubborn old bachelor as I was, had actually made me think it possible that I might do worse than part with my freedom.

I wish it to be distinctly understood that there was no foolish nonsense in my mind when I thought of Alwyne. I judged her calmly in the light of reason. She appeared to me a good daughter, a good sister, and a thoroughly agreeable companion—in short, an ideal wife for a sensible business man.

I took out of my pocket a rose which she had accidentally dropped in the garden, and which I had picked up, and forgotten to return to her. I was in the act of raising it to my face when suddenly I heard a sigh.

I turned round quickly—I was standing just below the dais at the time—and saw the door of the haunted wing slowly swing open to the width of a couple of feet, as though it were being opened just enough to let

someone through. At the same moment I was conscious of a subtle change in my surroundings, which I can hardly describe, except by saying that I felt as though I had fallen asleep, and awakened again in a different life.

The general aspect of the ancient hall remained the same, and yet somehow everything in it looked slightly less distinct, as though the faintest possible veil had been drawn between me and the objects at which I looked. The moon was not less bright, and the shadows it threw were not less black than before, but nevertheless both light and shadow had become less real, so to speak.

At the same time I was conscious that the change was as much in myself as in the objects round me. I seemed to breathe less vigorously, and to be deprived for a time of the power, or rather of the will, to move or take any part in what was about to happen.

The door opened as far as I have said, and then stopped. I gazed with the most intense curiosity to see who was coming in. But no one appeared. Only I could have sworn that someone or something *had* slipped through that open space, and was gliding softly across the dais towards the end of the table which bore the faded stain.

I turned my eyes, following the course of the unseen visitant, till it had reached the fatal spot. And then, to my astonishment and horror, I did see something. I saw a rose, a rose of the palest yellow or white, lying as if it had just been laid down by an invisible hand, on the exact spot marked by the stain of blood.

I stood still for a few moments, expecting something to follow. Then, as I again turned my eyes in the direction of the door, I saw it close again as gently as it had opened, and

without any visible agency. How long I stood in a manner enchanted, gazing from the closed door to the white rose lying on the board, I cannot say. It seemed half-a-minute: it may have been half-an-hour.

Then I was aroused by a sound which clearly belonged to the world of reality. It reached me from above, and on looking up I saw that a figure had appeared in the musi-



I saw a rose, a rose of the palest yellow or white.

cians' gallery, which I have described as overlooking the dais.

At first sight I could have imagined that this figure was only a phantom of the brain, in keeping with the extraordinary illusion which I had just experienced. But as it moved forward to the front of the gallery I recognised that it was Alwyne herself.

She appeared to have come out of her sleeping room, unnoticed by my sister, and to have found her way into the gallery while in that somnambulistic state which I had witnessed on previous occasions. On the way she had assumed a curious disguise, in the shape of a heavy riding cloak, which she must have found among the ancient relics scattered about the old wing.

Clad in this garment she reached the balu-



There was a click, followed by a spark, as the flint of the pistol
... struck against the rusty pan.

trade of the gallery, and peered down at the mysterious rose. She stood like that, in an attitude of the most intent watchfulness, for some minutes. Then I saw her drop suddenly down on the floor of the gallery, concealing herself behind the balustrade, and shrouding all but her face beneath the folds of the cloak.

Unable to understand the cause of this singular manœuvre, I gazed round the hall

for some change that might account for it. The face of the somnambulist was turned in the direction of the door into the garden. I watched this door steadily, half expecting to see it open as the other door had appeared to do. But this time the spell which had governed my faculties ceased to operate, and I neither saw nor heard anything happen below in the hall.

It was different with the figure crouched in the gallery above. After an interval of time, which must have corresponded closely with that required for someone to enter from the rose garden and make his way to where the rose had been lying, I saw Alwyne rise slowly to her full height, cast aside the thick cloak, and extend her hand in the direction of the fatal spot.

The next instant there was a click, followed by a spark, as the flint of the pistol which she had been grasping struck against the rusty pan. At the same moment her hand loosed the weapon, which fell crashing on the pavement below.

It was the very pistol which I had idly examined in the course of the afternoon!

The noise, or the accomplishment of her purpose, put an end to the sleep-walker's trance. She made a natural movement of surprise, looked all about her, and caught sight of me.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she called out breathlessly.

I told her in a few words what I had seen.

"You came out into the gallery, wearing that cloak, and hid yourself behind the balustrade, after looking at the white rose on the table. Then at the end of a few

minutes you stood up and fired in that direction. You have just dropped the pistol on the floor of the hall."

I was startled by Alwyne's response.

"But that rose—the rose on the table—is not white. It is *red*."

I looked, and as surely as I am writing these lines the rose which I had seen lying there white in the moonlight had changed to the colour of blood-red.

Certain by this time that my senses were deceiving me, I made two steps of it to the spot.

The rose had gone! I swept my hand over the place where it had lain as I cried out to Alwyne: "There is nothing here!"

"*I can see it still!*" she replied.

"Come down, for Heaven's sake, or let me come to you; and get a light," I shouted back, thoroughly unnerved.

She moved back slowly from the gallery, first casting the cloak once more about her shoulders. I went and opened the door of the wing, and presently she came in sight, descending the stairs with a lighted lamp.

She passed her hand across her forehead as she observed:

"I am afraid the strain of these experiences is beginning to tell on me. Even now I am hardly sure whether I am awake or asleep."

I led her out on to the dais. This time there was no room for doubt. Neither white rose nor red was any longer there to tease the fancy. The old oak board lay in the moonlight, black and smooth as when we had seen it first.

Late as it was we could not forbear questioning each other as



He was in the act of stretching out his fingers to pick up the rose . . . when Sir William fired.

to the experiences of the past half hour. I described to Alwyne what I had seen or imagined, and pressed her to explain her own part in the strange episode.

Unfortunately, she could remember nothing of what had passed in her somnambulistic state. She could only guess that she must have been impersonating in a dream the principal actor in that grim tragedy which the old hall had witnessed a century or more ago.

We were interrupted by the appearance of my sister Jane, whom the sound of the falling pistol had roused. Something in the expression of my sister's face induced me to whisper hastily in Alwyne's ear:

"May I tell her you have made me a promise?—and will you keep it?"

With the nature of that promise, and its subsequent fulfilment, the reader has no concern. There, as far as we knew, ended the story of Bewley Hall.

But in due time I found a purchaser for the estate, for whom the romantic associations of the old Hall were the principal attraction.

He exerted himself to trace the history of Sir William Hedges, and succeeded in getting into communication with a member of the family, a rather remote descendant, who was induced to supply the following particulars:

Late in life, that is to say after he had passed his sixtieth year, Sir William took an old man's fancy for the daughter of his parish clergyman, a girl of scarcely seventeen. Rosamund, as she was named, showed the greatest reluctance to marry the knight, for no reason that she was willing to assign, except his great age.

Her father and mother, dazzled by Sir William's wealth and his promises on behalf of their daughter, forced her into the match, and in due course she went to live in the Hall as Sir William's wife.

But, unknown to her parents, and of course to her new husband, Rosamund had secretly given her heart to a penniless young gentleman of the Greville family, living some twenty miles away. Unable to bear the prospect of losing each other altogether, the lovers agreed upon a method of communication, which they meant should be wholly innocent.



Once in every month, when the moon was at the full, young Greville was to ride across to Bewley Hall by night, and obtain entrance through the door of the rose garden, of which Rosamund provided him with a key.

Rosamund, on her part, was to descend into the hall, after her lord had fallen asleep, and place a white rose upon the table as a token that all was well, and that she still preserved her fidelity to her first love. On entering the hall and finding the white rose there, Greville was to take it away with him, leaving a red rose in its place, as an answering pledge.

For some months the lovers kept up their romantic tryst without discovery. But at last there came a night when it had rained hard during the day, and unwittingly the lover brought in some of the mud of the rose garden on his boots, and left it on the stones of the hall.

As ill-luck would have it, Sir William woke that morning early, and came down before his household was astir. He noticed the mud-stains, and the red rose upon the table, and, following up the scent, discovered the hoof-prints of Greville's horse outside.

Firmly believing the worst, the knight swore to be revenged upon his unknown rival, and from that time he set himself to watch night after night for an opportunity of surprising him.

When the appointed night came round again, Sir William, who was as usual watching, while feigning to be asleep, saw his wife rise from his side, take a white rose in her hand, and go down into the hall.

Leaving the bedchamber directly after her, the knight armed himself with a loaded pistol, and went and hid himself in the musicians' gallery, to see what would follow.

He failed to see his wife, who was already returning upstairs again. But before Rosamund had made the discovery of her husband's vigilance, the door of the rose garden was opened, and young Greville stole in, with a red rose in his hat-band.

He was in the act of stretching out his fingers to pick up the rose left by his sweetheart, when Sir William fired. The ball pierced the lover's heart, and he fell forward, his blood gushing over the white flower, which it dyed to the colour of that one he had been going to replace it with.

Immediately Lady Hedges, who had that moment found her husband's place vacant, ran shrieking out into the gallery, and flung herself headlong down beside her lover's corpse, breaking her neck against the ground.

This awful catastrophe served to unsettle the reason of its author, whom the law refrained from punishing.

He caused the Hall to be shut up, and when he died many years after, he so ordered it by his will that none should reopen the ancient building, nor profane the scene of the tragedy with any sort of pleasure or diversion, as long as the Hall should remain in the hands of his descendants.

The above narrative, I need not remark, exactly fits in with the experiences I have just related, and which the reader is at liberty to accept or reject, as he may please.



A BAD BARGAIN.

"Is *this* my little baby brother?
Why what a teeny tiny, mother!
His head is like my rubber ball,
He isn't any use at all;
He is so very small, you see,
I'm sure he cannot play with me.
He will when he grows big, you say?
I want one who can play to-day.
'Twill take him such a time to grow,
I really cannot wait, you know,
Please, couldn't you," the small maid
cries,
"Just change him for a larger size?"

E. A. MAYO.





V.—THE HAUNTED WOMAN.

A Complete Story.

BY ALLEN UPWARD

A MONTH after the romantic adventure of Bewley Hall, I received the most extraordinary letter I have ever had in my life.

It was from a lady, and the envelope was marked *Private*. This is what I read:

The Abbey,
Abbotsbury.

DEAR SIR,

I have seen in the journal of the Psychological Research Society an account of some extraordinary discoveries made by you and a young lady named Sargent in connection with occult phenomena in old family mansions; and I am writing to ask you in confidence if you or she would be willing to come down here and see if you could do anything to put an end to a manifestation which has been going on for a considerable time.

I ought to explain that I am the only person in the house who has seen anything, and I have not mentioned it to anyone but my own maid, who can be trusted. I am *most anxious* that my son, Captain Throgmorton, should not hear anything about the matter, and therefore it is essential that no one should know why you are coming down. Some excuse will have to be thought of to account for your visit. My son is a widower, and has never recovered from the shock of losing his wife, and therefore you will understand that I must make it a point that on no account is he to be troubled.

I write to you in the greatest anxiety and distress of mind, and shall be prepared to pay liberally for your services and those of Miss Sargent, for which I shall be most grateful.

Trusting you will treat this matter as one *strictly* between ourselves,

I remain,

Yours truly,

(Lady) MARIA THROGMORTON.

P.S.—In replying, please do not use an envelope

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bearing the name of your firm, as the letter-bag is opened by Captain Throgmorton.

Had I listened to my first impulse, I should have written back firmly, declining to have anything to do with a matter which called for concealment, and especially when I was asked to visit a house under a false character.

Unfortunately, before replying, I showed the letter to Alwyne, whose curiosity was immediately aroused to the highest degree.

"I am certain there is more in this than meets the eye," she declared. "From the way this lady writes it is evident that she thinks there is some connection between what she has seen and her son—something which she is afraid to tell us. We must go down and find out at all events what the situation is, even if we go no further."

The moment I heard her talk like that, I bitterly regretted having shown her Lady Throgmorton's letter. I knew Alwyne's courage too well by this time to have any hope of frightening her off from an adventure because it threatened to have some risk. The only argument I could think of was an appeal to the conventions.

"I could not think of letting you enter the house of people we know nothing about under a false name, or in some concealed character," I said determinedly. "I might consent to do such a thing, but my wife is different."

"I am not your wife yet, you tyrant," Alwyne retorted with a sly smile. "If you



As I entered, she raised a gold and tortoiseshell lorgnette to her eyes.

show the cloven hoof like that I shall look out for some kind, good-natured husband who will not trample on me. But there is no need that I should take a false name, or do anything else that you don't like. Why shouldn't this lady advertise for a companion in the *Standard*, and I answer the advertisement, and go down on trial?"

I felt that I was no match for Alwyne's ready wit. She found a way out of every difficulty as soon as I stated it.

"Well, at all events, I shall insist on going down first, and finding out something more

about these people," I said. "How do you suggest that I should manage?"

Alwyne considered for a minute.

"There is no reason why you should not go down in your own name, too," she said at length, "unless Captain Throgmorton has heard of you. You might find out that from Lady Throgmorton I should think the simplest plan would be for her to send for you to advise her about some alteration in the house—those old places are always wanting repairs. Unless she can persuade her son to let it, he seems to be the master. You had better ask her for more information first."

The upshot was that I answered Lady Throgmorton's letter as Alwyne wished.

At the same time I looked up the family in the *Landed Gentry*.

The first result of these inquiries was the discovery that Lady Throgmorton was merely the captain's step-mother. She was the widow of one of our Ministers abroad, who had received the G.C.B., and Captain Throgmorton was his son by a former wife. Apparently, however, the step-mother and stepson had always been on the best of terms, and the widow of Sir Nicholas had remained on in the Abbey as its mistress until the captain's marriage, which had taken place about a year ago.

I could not learn anything about the wife's death, but it was clear that Lady Throgmorton had now resumed her old position.

At all events, she wrote back to me, saying that there was no need for me to drop my right

name, and accepting the suggestion as to letting the house.

In due course I received a letter in her handwriting, but signed Arthur Throgmorton, in which I was formally invited to come down and see the property.

It was with very much more excitement than I usually feel on such occasions that I drove up to the main entrance of the Abbey, through an avenue whose yellowing leaves seemed ominous of some catastrophe.

I was first taken up to a comfortable bedroom on the second floor, and given some

tea. Half-an-hour later, the footman who attended to me came back, and asked me to follow him down to her ladyship's room.

I could see from his manner that Lady Throgmorton had given orders that I was to be treated with all possible consideration.

The room into which he conducted me was one of a suite on the first floor, evidently appropriated to the mistress of the house. The furniture was almost new, and I hardly required to be told that the rooms had been prepared to receive the bride of Captain Throgmorton; they now seemed to have been relegated to his stepmother.

The appearance of my client startled me. She was a woman of fifty, still strikingly handsome, but disfigured by a too lavish use of cosmetics. She had assumed an artificial pose on a couch, beside which stood a table covered with smelling-bottles and such articles. As I entered, she raised a gold and tortoiseshell lorgnette to her eyes, and gave me almost a hostile scrutiny.

Behind her stood her maid, a tall, thin woman with pinched lips and half-shut eyes, who never moved nor spoke except to answer some question from her mistress or to hand her some scent or drug.

The sight of this rouged and laced-up figure, with its blackened eyelids and prominent nose, and the silent shadow in the background, made me feel as if I had stepped into the atmosphere of some place like Hamburg or Ostend, instead of an English country house.

"Sit down if you please, Mr. Hargreaves. And speak softly, if you will be so good. My nerves are absolutely destroyed—Madeline, the essence!"

The silent maid chose one of the bottles, and began dabbing her mistress' forehead, taking care not to disturb the powder.

"The experience I have gone through has been most frightful," Lady Throgmorton continued. "Every night it has been the same. I cannot sleep without taking enough chloral to kill anyone unaccustomed to it. And when I do go off—I dream!"

She gave a shudder, and raised a bottle of salts to her nostrils. Even where I sat I could detect the odour; in fact, the air of the room was thick with scents.

I waited for her to explain the nature of her experiences.

"Every night since I have been back in these rooms it has come to me," she went on. She seemed to have a difficulty in speaking out plainly. "It is an apparition—or at least

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it seems to be one—the apparition of my son's wife."

I thought it time to ask a question or two.

"Will you tell me a little more about the circumstances," I said. "When did Mrs. Throgmorton die? And how?"

She darted a fierce glance at me as I put the concluding question.

"She died six weeks ago, of pneumonia, in the room I am now occupying. After her death my son could not bear to sleep in it, and I thought it best to return to these rooms, which had always been mine."

"But if this apparition disturbs you there, why not try the effect of sleeping in some other part of the house?"

"Because it would be impossible to give any reason for changing again so soon. The servants would be inquisitive, and my son might suspect something." She hesitated before adding: "Someone else might take my place, and see what I have seen."

"I suppose you are afraid that if Captain Throgmorton heard of this it might distress him?" I hazarded.

Again she fixed me with a threatening glance.

"Captain Throgmorton must never hear of it," she responded. "The shock would kill him." She looked round at the maid for a moment. "We are afraid that he has not been quite right in his mind since his wife's death."

I could not conceal my consternation at this intelligence. I began to feel thankful that Alwyne had not come with me to such a house.

Lady Throgmorton saw that she must tell me something more.

"He would not believe that she was really dead, for a long time. Then he had a special coffin made for her, in the hope that she might come to life again. And he has told me that Eleanor would have appeared to him, if she really were dead, to assure him that she still remembered him in the other world."

I considered these extraordinary statements in my mind before replying.

"And are you sure that it would not be the wisest course to let him know what has happened, and give him the chance of seeing whatever you have seen?"

Lady Throgmorton turned to the woman behind her, and made her administer a dose of some restorative, before she answered this question.

"I dare not run the risk. If he saw what

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I see every night it might unhinge his mind altogether. The apparition is—"she paused, and seemed to pick her words—"is not a natural one. It is—strange. And—and horrible."

A convulsion passed across her face as she made this declaration. The rouge cracked on her cheeks, and the pearl powder went in flakes.

The maid interfered suddenly, addressing herself to me.

"I think you had better leave her ladyship now, sir. It will be bad for her to talk any more."

I rose, murmuring some polite expression of regret, and got out of the room as best I could.

It seemed to me that I had got entangled in some very alarming mystery, and that the only prudent thing for me to do would be to quit the Abbey as soon as possible, and not return.

I passed the time before dinner in strolling through the grounds, as if in discharge of my commission to inspect the premises.

At the meal I met the master of the house for the first time. He was not a very young man—some age between thirty-five and forty—and his manner was subdued. But he appeared quite able to perform the duties of a host, and talked to me in a reasonable and businesslike spirit about the arrangements for letting the Abbey.

"Neither Lady Throgmorton nor myself find it a very cheerful place just at present," he said. "In fact, I am seriously uneasy about my mother's state of health. She has been accustomed to the bright society of foreign capitals, and the quiet, lonely life we lead here has got upon her nerves. I ought to take her to Paris, I expect, or the Riviera."

I did not venture to make any direct reference to his dead wife, nor did he make any nearer allusion to the subject.

The only other thing of importance he had to tell me was that Lady Throgmorton would give me all necessary instructions.

"She has always managed everything here," he explained, "and I think it is a distraction for her just now to have the reins in her hands again. As for the shooting, it is not up to much, and the steward can tell you more about it than I can."

Nothing that I saw of Captain Throgmorton was inconsistent with his being in full possession of his reason. But there are such people as monomaniacs, able to take their part in the world without giving any indication of eccentricity apart from their

particular craze, and, of course, I could only suppose that my host was one of them.

But for the fact that the letting of the Abbey promised to be a piece of genuine business, I think I should have declined to have anything more to do with this family. As it was, I did not like to break with a client, and on my return to town I found Alwyne so keenly interested, and so determined to probe the matter to the very bottom, that I unwillingly gave way.

She went, as she had proposed, in the character of a prospective companion. I found it impossible to go with her, and could only urge her to wire me in case she felt the slightest uneasiness, and to come away instantly if things took an unpleasant turn.

I waited with the greatest anxiety for her report, which reached me on the second morning after her departure.

I need only extract the important passages:

"I arrived safely, and had what I suppose I must call a friendly reception from Lady Throgmorton. I did not see the Captain, as Lady Throgmorton's meals were served in her own boudoir, and I took mine with her.

"I felt a great dislike for the maid, Madeline, who seemed to me to resent my coming. I fancied that she was playing on the fears of her mistress for some purpose of her own, and did not relish the idea of my doing anything to relieve them. In fact, I thought it quite possible, at first, that the apparition was the result of some trickery on her part.

"I wish I could think so still. I wish I had never seen what I saw last night, and what I am afraid I shall never be able to forget.

"When I say that I have seen it, I do not mean to be positive that it was an objective manifestation. My experience may have been purely subjective; that is to say, I may have been in sympathetic rapport with Lady Throgmorton, so that her vision was communicated to me.

"That seems all the more probable because the maid, who has slept with Lady Throgmorton since these experiences began, declares that she has never seen anything.

"Whichever it was, nothing would have induced me to face such a manifestation had I been warned of its character. But, as you know, I always consider it necessary that I should be told nothing in advance, in order to avoid the possibility of suggestion.

"Lady Throgmorton struck me at the

outset as a hysterical subject, just the sort of woman to be the victim of a nervous delusion, and therefore I did not much expect to find any reality in her experiences.

"A bedroom had been prepared for me adjoining her own, but it was arranged that I should actually pass the night in a bed in her room, which was usually occupied by the maid. Madeline was to take the bed in my room in exchange.

"I will not dwell upon the figure presented by Lady Throgmorton at night, without the paint and the powder which disguised her in

in bed for more than an hour. Lady Throgmorton seemed unable to sleep, and kept fidgeting with the bottles beside her, while I lay with my eyes half shut, watching the shadows on the ceiling, and listening to the restless movements of my unseen companion.

"I was just dozing off when suddenly I heard an agonised gasp, almost a shriek, from the other bed.

"In an instant I was wide-awake, and sitting up to look round.

"The first thing that met my eyes in the



The figure which met my sight was that of a woman prepared for burial.

the day. She had a table beside her bed for her sleeping-draughts and salts, and I noticed that she lay huddled on the very edge of the bed, as though to have her medicines within easier reach.

"I wanted to have all the lights extinguished, but she insisted passionately on having a night-light, and as she assured me that she had had one burning every time the apparition visited her, I could not very well object.

"Nothing happened till we had both been

dim light was Lady Throgmorton, stretched out stiffly in her place, with her head thrown back on the pillow, and her eyes fixed in a glassy stare, like a person undergoing a cataleptic seizure.

"I followed the direction of her eyes without seeing anything more for the first few moments.

"Then, as I withdrew my eyes from wandering about the room, to return to where she lay breathing convulsively, I saw the cause of her terror.

"There was another person in the bed beside her.

"I have said *in*, but I ought to have said *on*. The figure which met my sight was that of a woman prepared for burial. She lay stretched out in the rigid attitude of the dead, her face and form wrapped tightly round with white linen grave-clothes.

"My heart nearly stopped beating at this silent invasion of the bed of the living by the dead.

"But the worst was still to come.

"While I watched, an awful change came over the spectral corpse. The linen wrappings appeared to decay by swift stages, and finally to fall away and hang in shreds from the appalling Thing—for all humanity had left it—which they had concealed.

"What I then saw I can hardly bear to think of, much less to describe.

"And imagine this horror seen lying side by side with a living woman who seemed to know it was there, and to feel the dreadful pollution of its touch!

"I hardly know what I should have done if the sight had lasted a moment longer. But with the full revelation of its unutterable loathsomeness the Thing vanished—vanished from its place without any apparent movement, leaving me with the sickening dread of seeing it as suddenly return.

"Common feeling compelled me to go to the assistance of Lady Throgmorton. I had hardly set foot on the floor when she began trembling all over, and calling out the name of her maid.

"The woman, who had evidently been expecting a summons, opened the door immediately, and came in. She darted an inquisitive look at me, a look of distrust and even of alarm I fancied it, as she passed to the side of her mistress, to whom she began giving things out of the bottles.

"I busied myself in lighting a pair of candles on the mantelshelf. As soon as Lady Throgmorton was able to speak I heard her demand anxiously:

"'Has she seen it? Did you see anything?'

"I turned towards the bed, and found mistress and maid waiting for my reply with apprehension.

"'Yes, Lady Throgmorton. At least, I have seen something, which I expect is what you have seen. A dead body, lying beside you on the bed.'

"She uttered a groan as she nodded her head in confirmation.

"'And—and did anything happen to it?' she asked in a whisper.

"I could not suppress a shudder as I answered: 'It assumed an appearance of decay.'

"Mistress and maid exchanged glances of intelligence.

"'I was right, you see, Madeline,' the lady said. And then she added, to my intense surprise: 'It has grown worse night after night. The first time I saw it, the shroud remained intact. Since then the change has gone on regularly.'

"There was only one thing to say, and I said it.

"'In my opinion you ought not to pass another night in that bed, nor in this room. Whatever be the real nature of this experience, it is clear that the only chance of its ceasing is for you to leave off sleeping here.'

"In Lady Throgmorton's pitiable condition I hardly liked to question her on the subject of the spectre. But the idea had already presented itself to my own mind that the ghastly figure which was haunting her could only be that of her son's late wife, and the horrible changes it had undergone seemed to correspond with the decay of the actual corpse.

"Having been assured that there was no chance of anything more occurring that night, I went back into my own room, leaving the maid to take my place.

"This morning I have had a long talk with Lady Throgmorton, in the absence of her maid. She has told me quite frankly that she considers the apparition to be that of the late Mrs. Throgmorton. She intends leaving for London to-day, on her way to Paris, and the Captain goes with her. She has pressed me very strongly to remain behind, and to pass at least one more night in the haunted room; and as I wish to ascertain whether my own experience of last night was objective or subjective, I think I shall consent.

"But I dare not make the experiment alone, and as Lady Throgmorton is strongly opposed to any of the servants being made acquainted with the mystery, I have promised to ask you to join me here for the purpose.

"Please wire."

So ended the report, with the exception of some personal messages of no interest to the public.

I need not remark on the courage of this brave girl in consenting to remain alone in a house where she had had such a frightful experience. I wired immediately to say I should arrive by the next train, and I was as good as my word.

I found Alwyne installed as Lady Throgmorton's deputy, in charge of the house and servants, who were all under notice to leave.

We decided to sit up till the hour at which the sepulchral figure would appear, if it appeared at all. In good time we moved into Lady Throgmorton's room, extinguished all the lights except the solitary night-light, and sat watching for what might happen.

A surprise awaited us.

We were ignorant of the exact minute at which the previous manifestation had occurred. But midnight came and passed without the slightest sign of anything uncanny.

I was just saying to Alwyne that I thought it useless to wait longer, when the silence of the night was broken by footsteps advancing suddenly along the corridor. In a moment the door was burst open, and we beheld on the threshold Captain Throgmorton, with a lighted lantern in one hand, and a revolver in the other.

"Explain the meaning of all this," he demanded sternly, as we sprang to our feet.

I was at a loss what answer to make to him. But Alwyne was quick to assert herself.

"We are here in pursuance of instructions from Lady Throgmorton," she said with dignity. "Perhaps you will explain how it is that, after leaving the Abbey in my charge, you have returned in this manner and adopted such a tone towards me."

The Captain was evidently not prepared for this retort, which at once subdued him.

"I will apologise, of course, if I am in the wrong," he said,

speaking more quietly. "I came down here because my stepmother's action in leaving you here seemed to me eccentric. I felt more and more uneasy as I got further from home, and finally, after seeing her off to Paris, I decided to run down here again and make sure that all was right. I have only just walked over from the station, and seeing a light in this room, I suspected something wrong."

He glanced round the room as he spoke with a mixture of curiosity and emotion.

I thought it was now time for me to speak.

"I trust my name, and the reputation of my firm, will be a sufficient guarantee that everything that has passed in your absence has been entirely in accordance with our instructions from Lady Throgmorton, to whom you may recollect you referred me. If you will now come with me into another room, I will tell you what those instructions were."

Captain Throgmorton took us downstairs into his library, and there I told him the entire story, as I have told it here, only omitting for his own sake the hideous detail of the change which had followed the first appearance of the spectral corpse.

"To-night we have seen nothing," I said in conclusion. "I think, therefore, you may rest assured that the whole thing is a diseased imagination on the part of Lady Throgmorton, due to the state of her nerves."



We beheld on the threshold Captain Throgmorton, with a lighted lantern in one hand, and a revolver in the other.

The Captain listened with the closest attention, wincing more than once at the references I had made to his dead wife. At the close he said :

"I am infinitely obliged to you for telling me this. It is true that I had a special coffin constructed for my late wife, but it was in discharge of a solemn promise to her, as she entertained a morbid dread of being prematurely buried. I may add that I engaged a medical man to visit the vault every day for a week, when he reported to me that changes had taken place which rendered it utterly impossible to doubt the reality of the death."

The reluctance with which he made this statement showed me that he knew what the doctor had seen. The changes were those which Alwyne had seen in the vision of Lady Throgmorton.

"Do you think there is any possibility that Lady Throgmorton may have heard of these visits?"

It was Alwyne who put the question. The Captain shook his head.

"I think not, Miss Sargent. Naturally I did not wish such a thing to be known, and I pledged the doctor to secrecy."

He frowned as he added :

"It is a very serious thing if my stepmother has been representing that my intellect is disordered, as you say. I must consider what is my best course; but I think I shall have to follow her abroad, and perhaps to take the doctor with me."

We separated for the night with mutual expressions of regret. In the morning Captain Throgmorton, opening the letter-bag as usual, found in it a telegram addressed to Alwyne.

It proved to be from Lady Throgmorton, who was staying at a hotel in the Avenue Friedland, and contained these words :

"I have seen it here. Come immediately."

On reading this extraordinary dispatch, not one of us any longer doubted that the sender's mind was unbihinged.

Captain Throgmorton at once sent a groom for the doctor, who arrived in the course of an hour.

When the doctor had been placed in possession of the whole of the facts — and this time I did not think it right to suppress anything — his manner became exceedingly grave.

"I will say nothing till I have seen Lady Throgmorton," he declared. "But I agree with you, Captain, that we ought both to go to Paris by to-night's boat."

Before leaving, Captain Throgmorton

and I exchanged promises, one of strict secrecy on my part, and on his own to communicate to me the final outcome of the affair.

That promise was never kept.

A brief note, so brief as to be almost discourteous, informed me that Lady Throgmorton had been confined, with her own consent, in a private asylum in the Department of Seine-et-Oise, and that is the last I have ever heard from the Throgmorton family.

The truth was revealed to me in a singular manner, some years after, by the last person from whom I ever expected to learn it — Lady Throgmorton's maid.

Having learnt that this woman had presumed to give my name as a reference, I found her out, and threatened her with proceedings. By way of excuse she pleaded that the death of her mistress had thrown her on the world without friends, Captain Throgmorton having refused to assist her because he suspected her of complicity in his wife's death.

That death, she now assured me, was the work of Lady Throgmorton, who was unable to endure the loss of her position as mistress of the Abbey, and of certain family jewels which went with the estate. It had been brought about, or at least hastened, by means of a drug which subsequently arrested the decomposition of the corpse.

The doctor, it appears, had already been struck by some unusual symptoms in the case, and again by certain unexpected signs in the decay of the body. On being informed of Lady Throgmorton's visions, or hallucinations, his suspicions were given definite shape, and a full confession was extracted from the wretched woman before her reason finally gave way.

Shortly after the somewhat abrupt conclusion of this adventure, a quiet wedding took place, and Alwyne Sargent became Alwyne Hargreaves. I do not think any explanation of my conduct in marrying my secretary is due from me, as a business man. Alwyne had materially assisted me to attain the prosperity I now enjoyed, and it was only right that she should share it.

Our Continental honeymoon helped to restore her health, which had been considerably impaired by the shocks to which she had been so frequently exposed.

I have now given up dealing in haunted property, and my wife will never in the future, I trust, be called upon to exercise her extraordinary gift of clairvoyance.